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**STATEMENT ON *THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:*
*2014 U.S. History, Geography, and Civics***

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With student scores representing a snapshot of student populations across the nation, the 2014 results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for U.S. history, geography, and civics have important implications for teaching and learning.

Only 18 percent of eighth graders tested in 2014 scored at or above *Proficient* in U.S. history, while just 27 percent scored at or above *Proficient* in geography, and 23 percent in civics. There has been virtually no improvement in student performance in these subjects since 2010. How do we, as a nation, maintain our status in the world if future generations of Americans do not understand our nation's history, world geography, or civic principles and practices?

Internet surveillance, terrorism, human rights violations, poverty, and race relations are among the challenges we face today. Responding to these issues requires a deep understanding of the historical and geographic context of each situation, political constraints, and the potential impact on society, the economy, and the environment. The world is growing more complex; low scores and lack of student growth in these subjects point to a need for immediate action.

Qualitative and quantitative data show that the social studies have been marginalized over the past decade in U.S. schools. Emphasis on raising test scores in reading, mathematics, and science has caused educators to prioritize instruction, professional development, and resources supporting these subjects, particularly in elementary school.

History, geography, civics, and other aspects of the social studies, such as economics, philosophy, sociology, and psychology, need to be taught as distinct subjects. We know that the ability to read, write, listen, and speak clearly impacts students' abilities to become proficient learners of the social studies. But students also must acquire knowledge found only in the social studies, understand complex concepts, and use analytical skills to apply what they have learned in meaningful ways.

Social studies isn't merely memorizing dates and facts. *Thinking like a historian* encourages students to analyze historical texts and sources for authenticity: examining context, questioning the author, and comparing multiple perspectives. *Thinking like a geographer* calls on students to

realize the importance of time, place, and movement to understand the impact of geography on people, places, and events. *Thinking like a citizen* calls on students to understand how our democratic government and other governments operate.

The NAEP findings also reveal startling gaps in knowledge and skills among black and Hispanic students compared with white and Asian students. Achievement gaps in U.S. history, geography, and civics are significant and have not improved since 2010.

Why is this important? The representative democracy established by our Founding Fathers calls for all members of society to be represented in legislatures, political offices, jury boxes, and voting booths. Unfortunately, this vision has yet to be fully realized.

Research conducted by Joseph Kahne at Mills College and Meira Levinson at Harvard University reveals a “civic opportunity gap” in schools across the nation. White or Asian students and/or those of higher socio-economic status are significantly more likely to engage in civic learning than their counterparts. Which groups will leave high school with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to participate responsibly in civic life?

However, the social studies community is optimistic about the future with the introduction of the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*, published by the National Council for the Social Studies in 2013. Developed by social studies experts from state departments of education, colleges and universities, professional organizations, and nonprofits, along with teachers, writers, and editors, the *C3 Framework* is being used by states to update their social studies standards, and by teachers nationwide to strengthen classroom practices.

Another cause for optimism is the inclusion of social studies in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization bill introduced by Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chair Lamar Alexander and ranking member Patty Murray. If signed into law as written, resources to strengthen social studies education would be available to local and state education agencies, higher education institutions, and other organizations. The social studies community is hopeful that these NAEP results will highlight the need to support social studies subject areas as part of a well-rounded education for all students.

World events increasingly demand informed, engaged problem-solvers — knowledge and skills found in the teaching of civics, geography, history, economics, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. The future of our communities, our nation, and our world depends on it.